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ABSTRACT

"Star Trek: The Next Generation" depicts sibling relationships between Data and Lore (android), Worf and Kurn (Klingon) and Jean-Luc and Robert (human) that illustrate conflictual communication and suggest teaching applications. The most disturbing empirical communication research on conflict between brothers reports that male sibling pairs are consistently more violent than female sibling pairs. The relationship between Data and Lore is introduced in "Datalore," further developed in "Brothers," and concluded in "Descent II." Despite the almost identical "genetic" similarities between the brothers and the fact that they share the same parent and home, their values are dissimilar. Worf and Kurn's relationship is introduced in "Sins of the Father" and continued in "Redemption I and II." Even though the Klingon culture is violent, arguments between brother are not settled by physical attack because the hierarchy contributes to smooth functioning. In the episode "Family," captain Jean-Luc is able to reveal his frailties to his brother Robert, who is placed in his once familiar role of giving advice and protecting his younger brother. Students can use these relationships to analyze change in system patterns, make cross-cultural comparisons, and to explore commonalities in relationships. Making comparisons across the systems can also illustrate the importance of considering cultural assumptions about conflict and conflict resolution. (Contains 21 references.) (RS)

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SIBLING COMMUNICATION IN STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION: CONFLICTS BETWEEN BROTHERS

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Brother

This is Halloween night, Andy.
The ghosts and goblins are going about,
Costumed kids with their tricks and treats,
with their sacks full of candy and apples
But I'm here, drinking from a pint of Antique,
the bourbon with the train on the label,
and gazing down at your moonlit headstone:

Quentin Andrew Ficklin
1949 - 1974...

Listen, no one blames me for shooting you, boy.
Just an accident, they say.
It can happen, will happen, does happen.
Not that that changes things, of course.
Well, Andy, brothers we were, sure,
but never, ever friends, I guess.
And, if anything, being drunk and sentimental,
that's what devils me good tonight...
(Etter, 1983)

Etter's poem powerfully illustrates a brother's guilt--guilt from killing his own brother, guilt at surviving himself, guilt that their relationship didn't fulfill his expectations of how brothers "should" relate. Sibling relationships and their common themes of "power struggles, solidarity, rivalry, and ambivalence" are more frequently explored by poets and novelists than by social scientists (Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 214). Reasons for social scientists' neglect are not clear, since sibling relationships are significant in frequency (80% of people have siblings), longevity (79% of older adults have living siblings, Lee, Mancini, and Maxwell, 1990), commonality of experience (Weisner, 1989; Arliss, 1993), and powerful emotional connections.

In addition to literary depictions, relationships between siblings are also portrayed in television programming. The two

themes that appeared with greatest frequency (over 80%) in prime-time network television programs from 1969 through 1978 were home/family and close personal relationships between men and women (Skill, Wallace, and Cassata 1990). Sibling relationships depicted in television programs serve a socializing function and provide a significant source of family role expectations (Galvin and Brommel, 1991). Margaret Mead observed that "TV more than any other medium gives models to the American people--models for life as it is, or should, or can be lived" (in Skill et. al, 1990, p. 129). Since conflict is a defining feature of sibling relationships (Schvaneveldt and Ihinger, 1979; Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1993), it is important to examine interpersonal conflict patterns in prime-time sibling relationships.

> These patterns of conflict and the associated communicative strategies might be viewed as very important social learning situations because, according to Bandura (1977), audience members may apply those models and strategies in an effort to resolve their own real-life problems (Skill et. al, 1990).

Star Trek: The Next Generation is the most frequently watched show on television by males aged 18 to 49. Additionally, a strong showing with a female audience has contributed to making the show syndicated television's highest rated hour-long drama (Svetkey, 1992; Luong, 1992). Star Trek: The Next Generation's usefulness for analyzing and teaching family communication has been discussed by Winegarden, Fuss-Reineck, and Charron (1993). The variety of family systems and subsystems depicted provide an excellent opportunity for family pattern and role analysis, as well as cross-

cultural applications and comparisons.

This paper focuses on conflict patterns between three pairs of Star Trek: The Next Generation brothers: Data and Lore (Android); Worf and Kurn (Klingon); and Jean-Luc and Robert (human). Although the original intent of this analysis was to also examine relationships between sister-sister dyads, these relationships have not been depicted in any depth in Star Trek: The Next Generation. Lursa and B'Etor, Klingon sisters, appear in "Redemption I and II" (episodes 100, June 17, 1991; and 101, Sept. 23, 1991) but have little individuality. Tasha Yar's sister, Ishara, is discovered in "Legacy" (episode 80, Oct. 29, 1990), but no direct interaction between the two is pictured because Tasha is already dead. Even though Star Trek: The Next Generation has improved women's roles over the original Star Trek, it still has been criticized for the secondary importance given to women (Luong, 1992). However, considering that "In the research literature on family relationships in adulthood, bonds between brothers virtually have been ignored (Matthews, Delaney, and Adamek, 1989, p. 58), Star Trek: The Next Generation makes a contribution in depicting several of these "forgotten" relationships.

In this paper, research on brother-brother conflict is summarized, conflict patterns in the three Star Trek: The Next Generation brother pairs examined, and teaching applications provided.

RESEARCH ON BROTHER-BROTHER CONFLICT

Non-Fictional Brothers

The prevalence of sibling conflict, particularly in childhood and adolescence is widely acknowledged (Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1993), but has rarely been the focus of investigation. "Little is known about the structure and process of sibling conflict" (Raffaelli, 1992, p. 652). Although researchers have given scant attention to adult sibling relationships (Lee, Mancini, and Maxwell, 1990), "Regardless of the characteristic investigated, in almost all cases sibling relationships are described as more negative for brother-brother dyads", and variation within gender-specific dyads is ignored (Matthews, Delaney, and Adamek, 1989, p. 58). In an exploratory study, Matthews et. al (1989) categorized responses from 98 pairs of brothers to questions about closeness, agreement, and understanding. Four levels of affiliation emerged: 1) disparate (16%), "did not agree on relational definition"; 2) disaffiliated (35%), "contact infrequent and perfunctory"; 3) lukewarm (31%), "interact primarily to solve problems"; and 4) closely affiliated (18%, p.62). Although this study did not examine possible differences in conflict between brothers in the various affiliations, it is reasonable to expect such differences between the different types. Fitzpatrick (1988) describes variation in approaches to conflict between different couple types who have been categorized based on their relational definitions.

The most disturbing research on conflict between brothers reports that "male sibling pairs are consistently more violent than

female sibling pairs", a finding that holds cross-culturally (Steinmetz, 1985, p. 575). Overall, 72% of male and female siblings between the ages of 18 and 30 "reported using physical violence to resolve sibling conflict" (Steinmetz, p. 580).

Prime-time Brothers

In studies of prime-time family interactions during the 1975 to 1977 season, brothers were found the least likely to engage in supportive behaviors, and conflict was "most likely to occur among spouses and brothers" (Greenberg et. al, 1980, in Skill et. al, 1990 p. 136). In their examination of conflict in intact, nonintact, and mixed (using two or more) families during 1987, Skill et al. (1990) found brothers were the most conflictual of all family members.

> Brothers in all family settings were most likely to escalate conflict. Denying argument validity, attacking the motives of the other, and disparaging the other were the most frequent strategies employed by brothers. The mixed family setting was found to be the most likely place for conflict escalation behaviors by brothers. Attacking the motives of others was their most frequent escalation behavior. Brothers in intact and nonintact settings were more likely to disparage the other (Skill et. al, 1990, p. 158).

The Skill et. al (1990) study provides a baseline for comparison of conflict behaviors between prime-time brothers. Differences in brother's ages (i.e., child, adolescent, adult) are not reported, but these would be helpful in charting developmental differences/similarities.

In addition to their socialization function, the specific conflict behaviors reported provide an example of the reflective

value of television's family relationships. The "truths", assumptions, and observations about prime-time brother's relationships can help generate research questions for our students and for ourselves as well.

CONFLICTUAL BROTHERS IN STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

A systems perspective suggests that as brothers interact with each other, their communication exchanges enable them to regulate themselves and maintain equilibrium by conforming to a familiar pattern (Cahn, 1992). An interaction pattern is "an ordered and repetitive sequence or connection of events" (Stierlin & Simon, 1985, p. 260), and a communication pattern "an organized repetitive sequence of communication exchanges that tends to be repeated" (Yerby, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Bochner, 1990, p 318).

> The patterns provide data by which to understand acts that may appear confusing or strange when used in isolation. Interaction patterns provide a means of assessing communication behaviors within a system, because they provide the context for understanding specific or isolated behaviors (Galvin and Brommel, 1991, p. 37)

Conflict occurs when brothers perceive that they have opposing values, interests, desires, goals, etc. Conflict is a developmental processes that can be viewed in six stages: 1) prior conditions; 2) frustration awareness; 3) active (manifest) conflict; 4) solution/nonsolution; 5) followup or aftermath; and 6) resolution, no longer affects the system (Galvin and Brommel (1991). Conflict and communication are interdependent, and

conflictual communication patterns give structure to the brothers' relationship (Galvin and Brommel, 1991, Cahn, 1992). These patterns are explored in the relationships between Data and Lore, Worf and Kurn, and Jean Luc and Robert.

Data and Lore

The relationship between Data and his brother, Lore is introduced in "Datalore" (episode 14, Jan. 18, 1988), further developed in "Brothers" (episode 77, Oct. 8, 1990) and concluded in "Descent II" (episode 154, Sept. 18, 1993). In "Datalore", an away team exploring the devastation on Data's home planet finds a disassembled clone for Data. Data convinces the Enterprise crew that it is important for him to try to assemble the parts as they may "be another me" or "possibly my brother", a chance "to find some link with a form like my own" and answer questions about his own origin. This illustrates Data's powerful desire for connection with someone like himself, of not wanting to be so unique that he is alone.

Once activated, the android tells Data that he is his brother, Lore, created by their father Dr. Noonian Soong to replace an imperfect Data. Data is shown advising Lore so that he performs well on board the Enterprise, illustrating the reflected appraisal that brothers receive (or perceive that they receive) from their sibling's actions. There is an expectation that Data and Lore, who appear as identical twins, will have similar abilities. They do seem equal in most respects, except that a more "human" Lore is able to use contractions whereas Data is not, and to understand the

human humor that often causes difficulty for Data. As is typical for siblings, the brother's abilities are compared, especially by Lore, who follows a pattern of presenting himself as superior and disparaging Data (Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1993). Lore tells Data (who does not feel emotion) "Try not to be jealous of my abilities." Lore flaunts the idea that he is more human than Data because he was given the full richness of human emotions. He tells Data that it is important to please humans and that he can help Data become more human, a transformation Data greatly desires.

Despite the almost identical "genetic" similarities between the brothers and the fact that they share the same parent and home, their values are dissimilar. They have experienced a different family environment.

> The family environment is not the same for all children in the same family. The impact of that environment on a child's behavior and personality is affected by the child's understanding and interpretation of that environment. Siblings are quite likely to experience similar situations but emerge from those situations with different interpretation of what happened. (Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1993).

Data assumes the positive or good child identity, whereas Lore is the negative or bad child, a situation that can become pathological (Arliss, 1993). An irony is that Data, the perfect machine, tries to be more human, whereas, Lore who is more human is unstable and deceptive. Data, the dutiful, follows his captain's orders to monitor Lore, to which Dr. Crusher remarks, "You are watching everything he does, Data. Is that the act of a brother?" It would seem that brothers who do not have a past history of trust are suspicious of the motives of their sibling, perhaps to a

greater extent than they are of non-family members. Any suspicions of Lore are well founded, as he disables Data, brutally kicks him, and assumes his identity. Lore, responsible for betraying the earth colony on his home planet to the crystalline entity, almost succeeds again with the Enterprise. A reactivated Data and Lore engage in physical combat in which they throw barrels at each other The physical violence between the brothers is intense and escalates until Data throws Lore onto the transporter that sends Lore into space.

In "Datalore", the two brothers have differing expectations for the brother role. Data desires a connection with Lore and his actions are helpful and basically "friendly", despite the accumulating evidence of Lore's deception and cruelty to him. Lore, on the other hand, entirely self-focused, does not hesitate to betray and injure his brother in pursuit of his own goals. These differences mirror life, as "Siblings tend to give different accounts of their relationships with each other. Siblings are also likely to treat each other differently, for example, with one sibling being more friendly than the other" (Noller and Fitzpatrick, p. 218).

In "Brothers", a homing signal brings Data to Dr. Soong, his creator/father who had been presumed dead. The same signal also brings a surprise visitor, Lore, reactivated by traders who picked him up in space. The dying Dr. Soong explains that he deactivated Lore because Lore was unstable and acting irrationally--his ability to experience emotion became twisted. He then built Data without

the emotional program. Data realizes that Lore lied to him and he is not less perfect. Dr. Soong has developed a chip that will give Data the emotions that he so strongly desires. When a jealous Lore protests, Dr. Soong explains that he did not make a chip to correct Lore because he did not know he was still alive. When Dr. Soong leaves to rest before inserting the chip in Data, Lore again attacks Data, disables him, and dresses in his uniform. Dr. Soong implants the chip in Lore and does not discover his error until Lore reveals himself, hurls Soong on the floor, and leaves. Rescued by an Away Team, Data watches his creator die. After returning to the Enterprise, Data notices the reconciliation between two young brothers who had a major conflict. Dr. Crusher replies, "They're brothers, Data. Brothers forgive."

The conflict between Data and Lore in "Brothers" bears certain resemblances to that between Jacob and Esau in the Old Testament. In Genesis 27 Jacob (the younger of the twins) dresses in Esau's clothing, pretends to be Esau, and deceives his dying father Isaac so that he receives the blessing intended for Esau, the oldest. In both of these conflicts, there is competition over a scare resource offered by a father (i.e, one chip, one blessing), with one brother using deception to steal from the other. Dr. Crusher's reference to forgiveness between brothers also parallels the forgiveness that Esau later extends to Jacob and serves to foreshadow a reunion between Data and Lore.

Lore displays the jealousy he had attributed to Data in "Datalore", accusing Soong of giving preferential treatment to

Data. It is common for siblings to be jealous of the other's relationship with their father and for them to report differential treatment by parents, with greater affection and attention given to the younger. The more jealous sibling also displays greater emotion (Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1993).

Lore's jealousy of their father's treatment of Data, his own resentment that he was deactivated, his memory of previously unresolved conflict, and his desire for the scare resource are among the most powerful prior conditions for conflict in "Brothers". Data too, has memory of his previous experience with a deceitful Lore.

Lore perceives Data as blocking him from the chip (frustration awareness) and repeats the sequence of events in which he initiates violence, deactivates Data, dresses in his clothes, and assumes Data's identify in order to deceptively meet his goals (active conflict). The solution stage is when Lore transports himself to the Pakled ship (withdrawal). The follow-up or aftermath of this conflict is atypical in that Data does not have emotions and thus does not carry hurt feelings forward, although he does retain full memory of the conflict.

In "Descent I" (espisode 153, June 12, 1993), Data experiences the emotions of anger and pleasure after killing one of the Borg. He leaves the Enterprise and joins his brother Lore, who has been transmitting negative emotions to him. An away team ("Descent II", episode 154, Sept 18, 1993) discovers that Lore, commanding a group of Borg, is transmitting part of his emotional program to Data and

feeding Data negative emotions as he controls him by means of a carrier wave. Lore has also deactivated Data's ethical program. Lore's need for control is again evident as is Data's desire for emotions, a desire Lore uses to manipulate him. Conflict arises when the away team reactivites Data's ethical program and he starts to question Lore's actions. When Data fails Lore's loyalty test to kill Picard, Lore prepares to "sacrifice" Data. Help arrives in the nick of time, Lore runs, and a now armed Data follows. Lore, attempting to escape offers to take Data with him and to give him the chip their father made. Data shoots Lore and as he deactivates him, Lore says, "I love you brother".

In "Descent II" the brothers' values again conflict. When Lore perceives that he is not in control, he turns to physical violence, willing to "kill" Data, an act that Data reciprocates. The ambivalence in Data and Lore's relationship is reflected in Lore's dying comment. Data and Lore had expectations of being alike but are not. Data wants to be more human, to feel the emotions that Lore has, and experiences a desire to be one with his brother. Data and Lore are, however, always doing battle with their differences.

Worf and Kurn

Worf and Kurn are Klingons, a warrior race with a strong appetite for violence. Revenge for wrongs is a way of life, and "cool deliberations" are not stressed in Klingon problem-solving (Burleson, 1993). Above all else, Klingons value honor, both personal and family, although the two reflect on each other. The

family of a Klingon warrior is responsible for his actions for seven generations. The Klingon culture is rule-bound with respect to hierarchy, with position and age considered important.

Worf and Kurn's relationship is introduced in "Sins of the Father" (episode 65, March 17, 1990) and continued in "Redemption I & II" (episode 101, June 17, 1991; and episode 102, Sept. 23, 1991). Worf believes that all the other members of his Klingon family perished in a massacre on Khitomer and is not aware of the existence of a surviving brother. The interaction between the Klingon brothers begins when a first officer, Commander Kurn comes aboard the Enterprise as part of a cultural exchange program between the Klingons and the Federation. Kurn is harsh and demanding with the crew, except for Worf, whom he treats with gentleness, an insult for a Klingon. An angry Worf confronts Kurn.

Worf: I wish to know if I have given you offense.

Kurn: I am <u>not</u> a human. If you had given offense, you would not need to ask.

Worf: Yet you dishonor me at every opportunity.

Kurn: I did not know that being polite to a Starfleet officer would bring dishonor on him.

Worf: I am a Klingon.

Kurn: Really? Perhaps your blood has thinned in this environment. I simply didn't want to..hurt you. (As Worf growls and moves to attack) Enough! That is the response of a Klingon. The response I would expect from my <u>older</u> brother.

Worf has passed passed the "loyalty test", and Kurn informs him that their father was branded a traitor. As the eldest, Worf must participate in a challenge to clear their family name. As the

two brothers plot their strategy, disagreements arise, but they are settled by rule of hierarchy--Worf's word as eldest son "goes", as illustrated in the following exchange from "Redemption I".

> Kurn: It is time to sweep away the old Council and put a new one in its place. I already have the support of four squadron commanders in key strategic sectors. Join us Worf, and we will usher in a new era and regain our family name.
>
> Worf: We cannot regain honor by acting dishonorably. (Kurn argues... and Worf responds) I am the elder brother, Kurn. I speak for our family.

Thus, even though the Klingon culture is violent, arguments between brothers are not settled by physical attack because the hierarchy contributes to smooth functioning. Worf and Kurn often disagree on the means of accomplishment, but do agree on the end goal of restoring their family honor. An interesting twist occurs in "Redemption II" when Worf serves as weapons officer on the ship that Kurn commands. On board the ship, Kurn is in charge, but off the ship, the family hierarchy prevails. Worf becomes increasingly disenchanted with the violent Klingon ways and has verbal disagreements with Kurn over this issue. Worf's realization that the Klingon way is no longer his way presents an interesting commentary on how cultures impact each other.

<u>Jean Luc and Robert Picard</u>

"Family" (episode 76, Oct. 1, 1990), shows the Enterprise captain Jean-Luc, weakened and shaken by his ordeal with the Borg, deciding to visit his home in France for the first time in twenty years. Some conflicts between Jean-Luc and his older brother Robert have remained unresolved. After their father's death, the

two competed for their mother's attention (Ruff, Burleson & Gardner, 1993). Robert, a traditionalist, has kept up the ancestral home, is a grape-grower working with the earth, and strongly dislikes technology. He resents Jean-Luc's roving among the stars and emphasizing the future rather than the past. When Jean-Luc first walks up to Robert, who is tending grapes in the vineyard, Robert doesn't even turn around and says flatly, "So you've arrived."

Jean-Luc replies, "It's good to see you."

Robert, however, answers only with details about when they will eat and comments on tending a sick vine (an excellent metaphor for the brothers' relationship).

In following scenes, the brothers remain distant and have several disagreements over technology and the admiration Robert's son Rene (who wants to be a starship captain) feels for Jean-Luc. Finally, the brothers' conflicts erupt in a brawl. Jean-Luc is drinking and Robert tries to push him to talk about his experience with the Borg, saying, "I always thought you needed a little humiliation. Or was it humility? Either would do."

Jean-Luc withdraws from the house trying to avoid a fight, but Robert follows him and admits to being jealous of Jean-Luc's achievements (valedictorian, etc.). Robert continues to spill out his resentments about how Jean-Luc broke their father's rules and got away with it, while Robert was the responsible brother and it was his job to look after Jean-Luc (perceived preferential treatment). Jean Luc responds with an attack on Robert's motives,

saying "You were the bully."

Robert answers, "Did you come back because you wanted me to look after you again?"

Jean-Luc explodes and punches Robert. The two tumble in the mud, release their anger, and end up laughing. Jean-Luc suddenly begins crying, opening up to Robert about the self-doubts his encounter with the Borg raised, revealing that "I wasn't strong enough."

With gentleness Robert replies, "So my brother is human after all."

Jean-Luc admits, "I did come back so you could help."

Jean-Luc, the illustrious starship captain who often appears as more than human to his crew, has been able to reveal his frailities to Robert, who is placed in his once familiar role of giving advice and protecting his younger brother. In this conflictual process, healing occurs. The brothers continue drinking and singing, having resolved their differences. When Jean-Luc is leaving to return to the Enterprise, the brothers hug each other, a sharp contrast to their initial greeting. Their conflict resolution has induced a change within their system.

TEACHING APPLICATIONS

An instructor can use the relationships between Data and Lore, Worf and Kurn, and Jean-Luc and Robert either by themselves or jointly. If just one relationship is selected, students can, for

example, analyze change in system patterns induced by Jean-Luc and Robert's conflict resolution. If used jointly, students can make cross-cultural comparisons and explore commonalities in the three relationships. Some possible comparisons include value differences between siblings (all three pairs experience these), the loyalty test (Lore to Data, Kurn to Worf), and perceived preferential treatment by a parent (Lore of Data, Robert of Jean-Luc).

Specific conflict behaviors can be assessed. Students could make a comparison to the Skill et. al study and record instances when disparaging, attacking the motives of the other, and denying argument are used. Examples of disparaging in all three relationships follow.

Lore to Data: (implying that Data does not see the potential of his positronic brain), "You are beginning to think like a human my dear brother."

Kurn to Worf: "Perhaps your blood has thinned..."

Robert to Jean-Luc: "You needed a little humiliation."

Making comparisons across the systems can also illustrate the importance of considering cultural assumptions about conflict and conflict resolution. Pearson (1993) writes that since "Families do not resolve conflict similarly, we must be hesitant in prescribing appropriate methods of conflict resolution for all" (p.355). This caution seems well taken when considering a Klingon response to the suggestion that "Family members should demonstrate a sense of equality rather than a sense of power or control over others" (Pearson, 1993, p. 356).

Bach and Wyden's criteria for fair fighting (reality, injury, degree of involvement, assumption of responsibility, humor, expression of agression, communication, directness, specificity) can be applied to specific conflicts (Galvin and Brommel, 1986). Students can evaluate the cultural assumptions that are implicit in these 9 criteria. Directness and specificity might not work in all cultures, for example. Students can design their own criteria for evaluating whether a conflict is fair or constructive. They could design a fair fighting chart for a specific culture such as the Klingons.

The conflicts presented in Star Trek: The Next Generation also stimulate discussion about violence between siblings as well as the socializing function of TV depictions of it. Discussion can center around the seeming acceptability of violence between siblings. Students could read Steinmetz's (1985) study and discuss her contention that when sibling violence is viewed as normal that this "simply reinforces the acceptability of this method for resolving conflicts" (p. 576). Cultural differences and similarities in acceptability of sibling violence can also be addressed.

CONCLUSION

Star Trek: The Next Generation depicts sibling relationships between Data and Lore (android), Worf and Kurn (Klingon) and Jean-Luc and Robert (human) that illustrate conflictual communication. The relationships are important to examine, both for their socializing function in providing role models and for their

reflective function in providing observations about sibling conflict. The different cultures represented facilitate examination of cross-cultural differences/similarities and sensitize students to cultural influence in assumptions about effective conflict resolution.

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